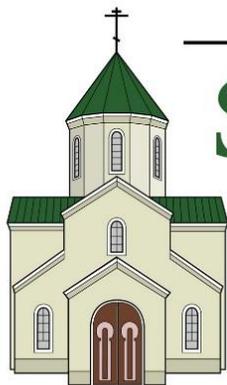


May 2017



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# SAINT INNOCENT ORTHODOX CHURCH

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7301 Rivoli Road, Macon, GA 31210

Fr. Theophan #478-538-8161, email [fr.theophan@st-innocent.org](mailto:fr.theophan@st-innocent.org)

[www.st-innocent.org](http://www.st-innocent.org)

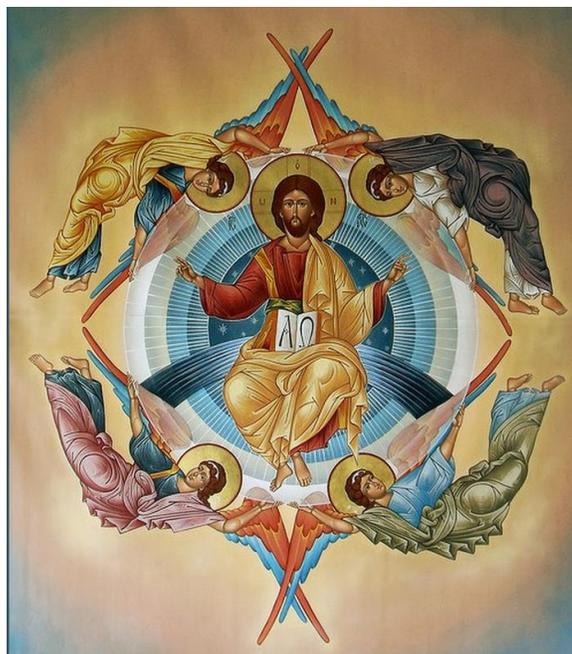
## May 2017 Newsletter

### *Through Your Glorious Ascension*

By Fr. John Breck

Psalm 67/68 is considered by most biblical scholars to be the most difficult of all psalms to interpret. The current consensus holds that the psalm was an ancient cultic hymn, originally recited in an autumn festival by the covenant-community of Israel. Its theme celebrates the coming of God to His people, from Sinai to Zion, in order to actualize in their midst His past mighty works of salvation. This actualization then leads the people toward the eschatological future, the age to come, when God's glory and majesty will be recognized and acknowledged by all the nations of the earth.

As difficult to interpret as many may find it to be, this psalm, with its opening cry, "Let God arise!" is nevertheless one of the most familiar biblical pronouncements of the Orthodox paschal season. It begins with what the Church recognizes as a prophetic announcement of our Lord's resurrection. This is complemented by what biblical and patristic



tradition sees as allusions to Christ's ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. St Paul offers this interpretation in his letter to the Ephesians, where he modifies, in a minor yet significant way, the Septuagint version of Ps. 67: "When He ascended on high, He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men" (Eph 4:8). Those gifts, as the apostle declares, include the *charismata*, the "spiritual gifts" or

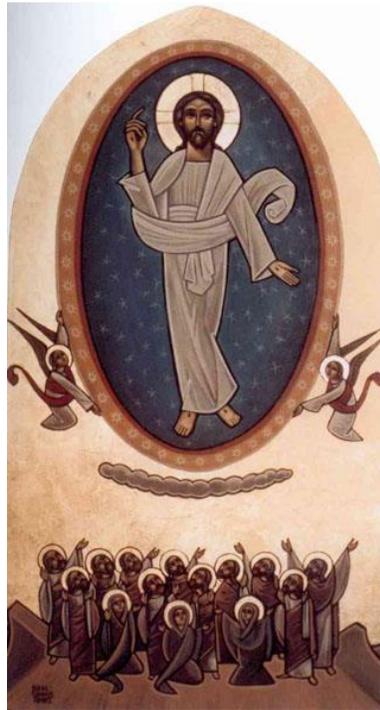
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gift of the Spirit Himself, bestowed upon the Church for the preaching of the gospel and the upbuilding of the Body of Christ.

Another theme emerges throughout this letter, also derived from Ps. 67/68. By his descent into the “depths of the earth,” into the heart of the fallen creation, Christ destroys the power of sin and death. And by His ascension in glory, He “fills all things with Himself” (Eph 4:9-10). This is the same message proclaimed by the Gospel of John: “No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man,” and this, to work out salvation and eternal life for all those who believe (Jn 3:13-15).

The entire Christian mystery is expressed by this double movement of descent and ascension, the incarnation and glorification of the eternal Son of God. As Orthodox spiritual and liturgical tradition affirms, this movement was undertaken not for Christ’s own sake, but for ours. Through His incarnation, the Son of God took upon Himself our very life and being, the specific conditions of our human nature, in order to restore that nature to its original perfection, and to open the way for us to ascend with Him to the heights of heaven, there to share with Him His own glory and majesty.

Elaborating on this theme, St Irenaeus of Lyon declares in his treatise *Against Heresies* (III.19.3), “The Lord himself gave us a sign... A virgin conceived and bore a son, ‘God with us’ (Isa 7:14). He descended into the depths of the earth to seek the lost sheep, His own handiwork, which He Himself had made. Then He ascended into the heights above, to offer and submit to His Father this humanity (*hominem*) which had been found, becoming Himself the first-fruits of man’s resurrection.”



A familiar prayer, attributed to St Symeon Metaphrastes (a mid-tenth century Byzantine hagiographer) and included in the Orthodox prayers before communion, recounts the significance of events in Christ’s life, death and glorification, together with their spiritual and moral significance for believers:

*“Through Your life-giving resurrection You raised up the first father who had fallen. Raise me up, for I am sunk in sin, and give me the image of repentance.*

*Through Your glorious ascension You made the flesh that You assumed to be divine and placed it on the throne at the Father’s right hand. Grant me to receive a place at the right hand with the saved through communion of Your Holy Mysteries.”*

By His incarnation, Christ deified the flesh, the body with its human nature, and thus He restored it to the perfection and glory for which God originally intended it. As the First Adam, the archetype of all human existence, and as the Last Adam, the Author of Life who gives life to those who dwell in Him, Christ ascends in his “divine flesh,” exalting newly perfected human nature with Himself. The throne is the image that symbolizes that exaltation. By placing His deified flesh on the throne at the “right hand” of the Father, God the Son makes the ultimate sacramental gesture, offering our own fallen yet restored nature to Him who is the Source of all life, both human and divine. Because of our incorporation into the life of the Son, we can hope to join with the saints, the host of the saved. Yet this hope is already partially realized, insofar as we partake of that divine life here and now by participating in the Holy Eucharist.

A further refinement of this theme is offered to us by the great Byzantine mystic, St Gregory of Sinai (+ 1346). In the chapter from the *Philokalia* known as “Further Texts” (Alia

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Capita, PG 150.1300), St Gregory describes in eloquent terms the correspondence between the descending, ascending movement of Christ and spiritual growth in our own life. The passage is worth quoting in full:

“Everyone baptized into Christ should pass progressively through all the stages of Christ’s own life, for in baptism he receives the power so to progress, and through the commandments he can discover and learn how to accomplish such progression. To Christ’s conception corresponds the foretaste of the gift of the Holy Spirit, to His nativity the actual experience of joyousness, to His baptism the cleansing force of the fire of the Spirit, to His transfiguration the contemplation of divine light, to His crucifixion the dying to all things, to His burial the indwelling of divine love in the heart, to His resurrection the soul’s life-quickenning resurrection, and to His ascension divine ecstasy and the transport of the intellect into God.”

To most of our contemporaries, this kind of interpretation of the events in Christ’s life seems odd if not scandalous. It strikes them as pure allegorizing: taking the historical events of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection, and reading them as metaphors to describe our inner spiritual state, the condition of the human soul.

To those of us who, in these past days, have sung out, “Let God arise!” and have tasted the heavenly gifts of his glorified Body and Blood, who have embraced others and been embraced with reconciling love “even by those who hate us,” this correspondence between the events of Christ’s life and our own is self-evident. Yesterday we were crucified with Him; today we rise with Him in glory. Yesterday He descended into the lower parts of the earth, into the darkness of our own life; today we ascend with Him in newness of life, in a potentially deified flesh, in order to take our place with Him at the right hand of the Father and in the midst of the communion of saints.

By His glorious ascension, Christ has already spoken to our deepest longing and fulfilled our most fervent hope. He has taken us as He took the hand of Adam, as in the paschal icon of the descent into hades. He has raised us up with Himself, out of the grave of our own making, and ascended with us into the awesome and blessed presence of His Father. He has transported into the very presence of God our “intellect,” our spiritual perception of transcendent life and being. And in so doing, He has led us—even in the mundane affairs of our daily existence—into the joyful and healing state of “divine ecstasy.”

<https://oca.org/reflections/fr.-john-breck/through-your-glorious-ascension>

## Announcements

- The Parish Council is scheduled to meet on Thursday the 18<sup>th</sup> at 7pm.
- On May 24/25 we will celebrate the Great Feast of our Lord’s Ascension. Vigil will be on Wednesday at 6pm and the festal Divine Liturgy will be served at 9am Thursday morning.
- On Friday, May 26<sup>th</sup> at 6pm we will serve the Paraklesis service for our prayer group. Please bring any names of the living you would like us to pray for.
- Confessions are heard *every Saturday after Great Vespers* or before Sunday Liturgy between 9:15- 9:40am. There is no need to schedule an appointment unless it is outside of the above times.

## Many Years!

<i>Birthdays</i>	10	Lee Olson
	11	Petru Luca
	11	Igor Osobov
	13	Olha Tsarykovska
	16	Susan Kehayes
	16	Meg Croft
	19	Alex Muresan
	22	Nicholas Dorogy

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28 Mose Williams

### Anniversaries

2 Paul and Kimberly Guest  
17 Radu and Daniela Malcoci  
25 Petru and Carmen Luca  
26 Michael and Benita Muth

## Parish Hall Project Update



On Sunday May 7, 2017 at the Special Parish Meeting the parish voted unanimously to “Pursue the financing and building of the Parish Hall.” If all goes well this project will be a reality for our parish very soon. There are a few more hurdles to jump through before we know for sure exactly when actual construction will begin. Please keep our community and this project in your prayers. Everything we do in the physical realm has spiritual consequences. Here is a basic process timeline:

- By the end of May we should have a clear answer from the Diocese of the South as to whether or not they will allow us to partake of the managed debt program for this project.
- If the DOS gives us the go ahead we will be able to finalize the numbers and get approvals from Planter’s First Bank.
- Once that happens there will still be appraisals, title search etc. and closing on the loan before we can access the funds.
- In the next few weeks you can expect to see a fundraising presentation. Even if the DOS helps we should try to reduce our debt footprint as much as we can.

- Construction is expected to take around 10 months. At this point the earliest we could start would be in July.
- Before construction starts we will have to empty the current parish hall and store our stuff. We will have to clean the parish hall before it is removed by Mod Space.
- Please pray for our community and this project.

### Concrete ways you can help

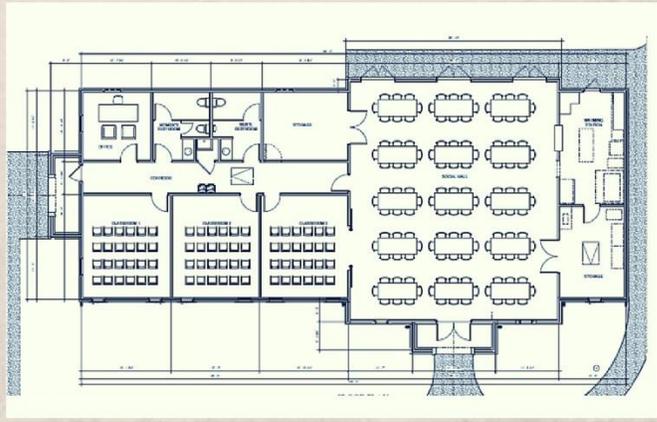
- Pray for our community and the project, that God would make His will clear and guide us in all things.
- Give your best gift. Any money contributed towards this the Parish Hall project will reduce debt load and increase our likelihood to be considered for the managed debt program with the DOS.
- Church Friendly Loans: There may be those who have monies that he or she might not be able to give outright to the parish hall project, but that might be put to use in the form of a “friendly” loans which would be used to fund a portion construction cost and would be guaranteed by the Diocese of the South. If you would like more information about this possibility, please contact Fr. Theophan.
- Amazon Smile: On your first visit to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com), you need to select St. Innocent Orthodox Church Macon, GA to receive donations from eligible purchases before you begin shopping.
- Kroger Community Rewards: Fr. Theophan has Kroger card signup forms. If you already have a Kroger card, you can update your Kroger Community Rewards online by visiting your Account Summary page. After selecting Community Rewards, there is a user info page (addr & phone #) which then takes you to a lookup page where you can enter the Org number (49127) or simply Innocent and select our church.



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# BUILDING OUR FUTURE

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## May 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 <i>Fr. Theophan day off</i>	2	3 6pm Daily Vespers	4 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	5	6 6pm Great Vespers 6:45pm Confessions
7 Paralytic 9:40am 3 & 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape 12:15pm Special Meeting	8 <i>Fr. Theophan day off</i>	9	10 6pm Daily Vespers	11 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	12	13 8-3pm Fr. Theophan McRae Mission  6pm Great Vespers 6:45pm Confessions
14 Samaritan Woman  9:40am 3 & 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape Mother's Day	15 <i>Fr. Theophan day off</i>	16	17 6pm Daily Vespers	18 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry 7pm Parish Council	19	20  6pm Great Vespers 6:45pm Confessions
21 Blind Man  9:40am 3 & 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	22 <i>Fr. Theophan day off</i>	23	24 6pm Vigil for Ascension	25 9am Divine Liturgy for Ascension 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	26 6pm Paraklesis (Prayer Group)	27 6pm Great Vespers 6:45pm Confessions
28  9:40am 3 & 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	29 <i>Fr. Theophan day off</i>	30	31 6pm Daily Vespers			

## June 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	2	3  6pm Vigil for Pentecost
4 Pentecost 9:40am 3 & 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours 10am Festal Divine Liturgy Followed by Kneeling Vespers	5 <i>Fr. Theophan day off</i>	6	7 Fast Free  6pm Daily Vespers	8 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry 7pm Parish Council	9 Fast Free	10 8-3pm Fr. Theophan McRae Mission  6pm Great Vespers 6:45pm Confessions
11  9:40am 3 & 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	12 <i>Fr. Theophan Vacation  Ss. Peter and Paul Fast begins</i>	13	14  6pm Readers Vespers	15 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	16	17  6pm Great Vespers
18 Fr. Dmitry Sub 9:40am 3 & 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	19	20	21  6pm Readers Vespers	22 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	23	24  6pm Great Vespers
25 Fr. Seth Earl Sub 9:40am 3 & 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	26	27 <i>Fr. Theophan Returns</i>	28  6pm Great Vespers Holy Apostles Peter & Paul	29 9am Divine Liturgy for feast of Peter & Paul 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	30	